

STARK, SMITH AND DODD INTRODUCE BILL TO HELP YOUTH RETAIN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES INTO ADULTHOOD

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Too many young adults with mental illness are falling through the cracks of our fragmented mental health system.

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – To help millions of young adults with a mental illness receive access to care, Congressman Pete Stark (D-CA), as well as Senators Gordon H. Smith (R-OR) and Christopher Dodd (D-CT), introduced legislation in their respective chambers to ease the transition from youth into adult mental health care and community supports. The legislation, the Healthy Transition Act of 2008, was introduced in response to findings of a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report released today that exposed the problems that young adults face in finding services that help their transition to adult services suited to meet their needs.

“Too many young adults with mental illness are falling through the cracks of our fragmented mental health system,” said Rep. Stark. “We have an obligation to these youth to provide appropriate and effective treatment and supports so that they can make the transition to independent and successful adults. The Healthy Transitions Act represents a strong step in that direction.”

“We have an important responsibility to ensure care is available for those with a mental illness throughout each stage of their life,” said Senator Smith. “In my home state of Oregon, those seeking to transition into adult care are 80 percent less likely than any other population in the state with mental health needs to receive services. This is a terrible statistic that demonstrates the urgent need for improvements to our current mental health care and support system.”

“Those who live with mental illness need our support and attention — particularly as they make the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood,” said Dodd. “As a society, we must ensure that these young men and women receive the care they need in order to make that transition in a safe and healthy way. This will take a coordinated effort between federal, state, and local organizations and our bill takes the first step toward achieving this important goal.”

Last spring, Representative Stark and Senator Smith asked GAO to study the barriers that youth face as they transition from the child and youth mental health system to the adult mental health system. The report found that 2.4 million young adults had a serious mental illness (SMI) in 2006. However, this is considered an extremely conservative estimate because they were not able to count homeless, institutionalized and incarcerated young adults, which are groups with high rates of mental illness. They also found that young adults with SMI have difficulty finding services to aid them during their transition to adulthood because services that are available for mental health, housing and employment are not always suited for and directed to young adults. The GAO encouraged federal government involvement to ensure support for this population through the Partnerships for Youth in Transition, a demonstration program run by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) from 2002-2006.

The Healthy Transition Act of 2008 is modeled on the Partnerships for Youth in Transition demonstration program. The bill establishes planning grants for states to develop statewide coordination plans to assist adolescents and young adults with a serious mental health disorder to acquire the skills and resources they need to make a healthy transition to adulthood; establishes a grant program to help states implement the plan they have created; and establishes a “Committee of Federal Partners” that will coordinate service programs that assist adolescents and young adults with mental illness at the federal level and provide technical assistance to states as they implement their plans.

The Healthy Transition Act of 2008 is supported by a number of child welfare and mental health stakeholders including National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and the Children’s Defense Fund.

The full text of the GAO report can be accessed [here](#).